Solidaric Work-Groups in Collective Settlements

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The aim of this paper is to explain the wide differences in solidarity observed in work-groups on collective settlements *(Kibbutzim)* in Israel. These differences will be explained in terms of the structure of the *Kibbutz* and the position of different work groups in it, informal communication and control,[1] as well as formal controls.[2]

Procedure

The research on which this paper is based constitutes part of a broader project, directed by Dr. Y. Garber-Talmon[3] in twelve *Kibbutzim* in Israel. In each *Kibbutz*, 25% of the members were interviewed, about many aspects of their lives. Fifty-one questions concerned work relations and attitudes. In two *Kibbutzim* special interviews were conducted with all members of seven work-groups. From the answers to the questions, the following indices were formulated to determine the degree of solidarity of the different work-groups:

1) The degree of consensus of the group members with regard to work, production-policy of the *Kibbutz* and general matters.

2) The degree of "we" feeling.

3) Positive, neutral or negative relations between members.

4) Subjective estimates of the amount of mutual aid in the group.

Information gathered through observation, was added to these indices.

Observation was conducted according to a written guide and covered relations between members of work teams during working hours, rest-intervals, after work and on days off; and relations between members of work-groups in the communal dining hall, during recreational activities, etc. A few members of the research team participated in the work-groups. On the basis of the interviews and the systematic observations, the solidaric work groups were located and their relation to the community established.

The Work Situation in the *Kibbutz*

Kibbutzim in Israel[4] are of the mixed farming type, and therefore contain various branches such as cattle, poultry, field crops *(falha)*, etc. Collective consumption is also organized by branches. The communal kitchen prepares and serves food to all members in the communal dining hall. The *tippul* provides care for younger children during the day and sleeping quarters for them at night.

Every evening the work coordinator assigns members to the different branches after the managers of the branches[5] have advised him of their manpower needs. Members *desiring* leave, transfer to a different branch, sick-leave, etc. also apply to the work coordinator. The manager of the branch serves as the main channel of communication between the administration of the *Kibbutz* and the particular work-group. He also holds the only recognized position of control in the work-group.

Managers of branches, the work coordinator, and all other members assigned to authoritative roles are appointed by and are under control of the weekly general assembly of the *Kibbutz* and its organs. Generally speaking, there is little differentiation between the work situation and other social situations.[6] As long as gaps in the channels of communication between the community and the work-group do not arise, the workers are directly under the formal and informal control of the whole *Kibbutz*. Every significant event in the sphere of work is known to the whole community soon after it has taken place.

Nevertheless, differences in the amount of social control exercised upon the various work-groups in one *Kibbutz* are easily discernible.[7] These differences result from gaps in the channels of communication connecting work situations with certain other social situation in the *Kibbutz*.

1. See George C. Homans, *The Human Group*, New York, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1950, esp. p. 417.

2. For a discussion of the concept of control in relation to the community, see K. Davis, *Human Society*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1950, pp. 61-64.

3. See Y. Garber-Talmon, "Social Differentiation in Communal Settlements." *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, Vol. III, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1956.

4. For the general social setting in Israel, see: S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Absorption of Immigrants*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954.

5. See M. Weingarten, *Life in a Kibbutz*, New York, Reconstructionist Press, 1955.

6. In the communal showers, where the gathering of members after work has a social character, discussions concerning work, are held. In the late afternoon, after work and shower, members meet on the big lawn, generally situated in the center of the *Kibbutz*, where again one of the main topics of conversation is work. See R. D. Schwartz, "Social Factors in the Development of Legal Control: A Case Study of Two Israeli Settlements," *Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Feb. 1954), pp. 471-490.

7. Compare to discussion of the client: Amitai Etzioni, "The Organizational Structure of Closed Educational Institutions in Israel." *Harvard Educational Review*, Spring 1957, pp. 107-125.

Conditions for the Segregation of the Work Group

We have found four conditions under which segregation of a work-group from general *Kibbutz* control, i.e., a gap in communication occurs:

I. The "Client."

The products of the *Kibbutz* are consumed by two kinds of "clients": 1) non-members (e.g., merchants) who buy the products, and with whom a transaction is concluded which resembles any other economic transaction carried out in a modern setting; and 2) members, who receive services and commodities from other members, e.g., food in the communal dining hall. The latter do not have to pay and do not have to prove their identity in any way. Thus they are clients in the sense that they consume products, but in another sense are not clients since no economic transactions and no impersonal relations are involved. They are given their share by virtue of being members of the community. This, of course, implies their obligation to participate in producing and in giving service, as well. For want of any better term for this type of consumer, we also call him "client."

1) A branch whose clients and workers are both members of the same *Kibbutz* is under greater informal control than a branch which caters to people outside the *Kibbutz*.[8] A comparison was made between the work-group in the communal kitchen and the work-groups in branches marketing their products in the neighboring town. The communal kitchen prepares the meals for all members; therefore, its clients are members of the *Kibbutz* itself. Information as to the quality of "production," efficiency of labor organization, labor relations, etc. in it, was found to be more abundant than similar information on other branches, whose clients were not members of the *Kibbutz*.

2) The intensity of the relationship with clients has great influence upon the degree of social control. Relations with the kitchen work-group[9] are more intensive than with that of the *tippul* in two respects: first, members generally eat in the communal dining hall three times a day; hence contacts with the kitchen workers are frequent; second, this relationship includes all members of the *Kibbutz,* thus contacts are extensive. On the other hand, the contacts of *tippul* workers with clients are less frequent and extensive. Members meet the *tippul* workers only once a day, in the afternoon, when they come to take their children for a few hours. Generally, no worker of the *tippul* is present when the children are put to bed by their parents in the communal children's house. Their relationships are also less extensive since they include parents only and not all members. However, from the point of view of involvement, contact with the *tippul* is more intensive than contact with the collective kitchen. The involvement of a member with his children is naturally greater than his involvement with food. Thus the intensity of contact with the communal kitchen and with the *tippul* is comparable. The stronger involvement in the *tippul* balances the more extensive and frequent contact with the communal kitchen.

3) We have found that the *institutional definition of the clients' position in relation to the branch* must be taken into consideration. Supplying the clients' needs in the communal kitchen is considered the main purpose of the workers. This means that the clients have a legitimate right of control. The main interest of the *tippul,* on the other hand, is the upbringing of children according to educational principles accepted by the whole *Kibbutz* society. These principles do not always coincide with the wishes and needs of the parents or even with those of the children. Obviously, the satisfaction of parents and children is considered desirable and is an important source of reward to the workers; yet it is supposed to be secondary to the "children's welfare" as defined by the explicitly formulated educational principles which are interpreted by the "educational committee" and by the general assembly. The clients do not constitute the major reference group of *tippul* workers' service aspirations. Hence, from the point of view of the above factor, the power of the clients' control here is more limited than it is in the communal kitchen.

4) *Defined standard versus lack of standard.* No accepted definition exists in the collective kitchen as to the quality of the services rendered to its clients. It is not clear what "good food" or "enough food" means. This "unstructured" situation is defined by the attitude of the members.

In this connection, an important development in the informal control of another branch supplying services to all members of the *Kibbutz,* the clothing store, is of interest. Here members' clothes are sewn, laundered, ironed, and mended collectively. In some *Kibbutzim* most of the members' clothing is stored in the communal store. Workers in the clothing store purchase the clothing (especially work clothes and bed linen) and distribute it to the members. In the twenties, when the *Kibbutz* movement was beginning, the leading principle of distribution (of all clothing) was: "to each according to his needs." Each member received a different amount of shoes and clothes according to his personal needs. A standard, defining what was due to each, was lacking; therefore, this system involved potential tension. Since solidarity was generally more intensive than it is today, mutual confidence greater, and interest in consumption as a whole smaller, this tension usually remained beneath the surface. These conditions have changed, and the hidden tension has come into the open. Today, in most *Kibbutzim,* standards have been defined determining clearly the number of shirts, pairs of shoes, trousers, etc., to be allocated to each member annually or the quantity which should be at any member's disposal. When comparisons were made in client-store worker relations, much less tension was found in *Kibbutzim* which had introduced these standards than in those which had not.

5) *Specialization.* Another factor is the degree of specialization and complexity of knowledge necessary for evaluation of the performance of different roles. In the dining hall, every member considers himself and is considered by others, an "expert" on food, competent to judge what "good food" is.

8. On the relation between public and industry in a community, see Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1942.

9. See William F. Whyte, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry,* New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1948, for discussion of customers' pressure on waitresses and the diffusion of the tension to other kitchen workers.

On the other hand, workers of the *tippul* are as a rule specifically trained. Education is recognized as a "profession" and individual members will not always take it upon themselves to criticize the workers of the *tippul* directly.

6. *Direct criticism versus indirect criticism.* a) Criticism of the kitchen is direct criticism. Members who are not satisfied, voice their complaints in the dining hall so that the cooks and those who wait upon the tables may hear. This gives rise to many conflicts. Waiting upon the tables in the communal dining hall is considered most "nerve racking." The pressure of the client is especially strong here. Since there is no mediating factor, this pressure often causes considerable tension both among the workers of the kitchen themselves and between workers and clients. Criticism of the *tippul,* on the other hand, is mediated by a special committee, appointed by the general assembly, responsible for the *tippul* and for education. Both workers and parents address their complaints and suggestions to it. Many a children's nurse was heard to reply to parents, who came to her with their complaints: "You'd better tell that to .... [Chairman of the educational committee]." Members usually accepted such an answer as legitimate, although few actually complained to the chairman unless they considered the matter important.

b) The dining hall of the *Kibbutz,* where food is eaten in common, presents an opportunity for the individual (by complaining about the food) to give vent to undifferentiated and unfocused tension, which he has regarding the collective. (The same applies to mess rooms in factories and in the armed forces, as was revealed by other research projects.)[10] Such an opportunity for voicing complaints is not present in the *tippul,* since there is no such direct contact with the entire collective. Usually not more than five fathers or mothers meet at the children's house at one time. Thus the reinforcement of clients' pressure on workers in the kitchens by the presence of many members is not present in the *tippul,* and pressure on the workers of the *tippul* is consequently weakened.

II. The Rate of Workers' Turnover.

It is customary for workers in the *Kibbutz* to change their place of work after an interval of time. However, the rate of turnover in different branches varies. As a rule a branch with a low rate of turnover is subjected to less pressure from members and is more segregated from them than are the branches with higher rates of turnover. "Closed" workgroups, which have permanent crews are relatively more segregated from public opinion and few members are acquainted with the problems of these segregated branches. There is little knowledge of workers' ability and effort, and less of what the expected or actual productivity is.

1) The rate of turnover should be considered in relation to the size of the branch. The smaller the number of workers in a branch, the less the amount of communication concerning it. A greater number of people are, obviously, more knowledgeable about a large branch than a smaller one, even when the absolute number of those who join or leave it, is equal in both.

2) The attributes of the workers from the point of view of our major variable, the flow of communication, must be considered as well as the numbers who change as opposed to those who remain. It was found relevant to examine the position which permanent and temporary workers of the branch hold, in the general structure of communication, (e.g., are some of them opinion leaders?) and in the structure of authority of the *Kibbutz;* and from what social groups they are recruited (e.g., old-timers versus newcomers; peripheral and passive versus more integrated and active groups). In one branch, the rate of turnover was low and the number of workers small, yet communication concerning it was rather intensive, because three *Kibbutz* leaders worked in this branch. Information from them generally aroused more interest than similar information supplied by non-leaders.

III. Prestige.

Different spheres of work have different degrees of prestige.[11] One of the most important criteria for this differentiation is derived from the ideology of the Zionist movement and of the *Kibbutz,* which attaches great value and high prestige to manual labor and agricultural work.

Formal and informal communication of any work-group with the *Kibbutz* as a whole is greatly influenced by the relative degree of prestige of the particular branch, as well as by the prestige of its workers. The higher the prestige, the lower the tendency of *Kibbutz* members and functionaries to communicate with or issue orders to this branch. The branch will have a high degree of "self-government" and self-control. Even informative communication will be relatively rare and branch members will sometimes receive no information until they ask for it. Most functionaries will tend to refrain from interfering with these branches. In short, little communication will flow from the *Kibbutz* to these branches. Communication from the latter to the *Kibbutz,* on the other hand, will be abundant and readily accepted. Special attention will be paid to reports on the branch's activities and to its demands for manpower.

We see here a different type of blocking. All the situations described earlier (except for that of the leaders in the workgroup) are two-sided. About the same amount of communication flows in both directions. Prestige, in contrast to this, causes a one-sided blocking. It blocks the flow of communication and the line of control from the community to the work-group, but does not hold back communication from the work-group to the community.

IV. Formal Communication.

Usually in the *Kibbutz* there is a high degree of informal communication on what is going on in the work-groups. However, there are work-groups under intensive formal organizational control which are relatively free from direct contact with members of the *Kibbutz.*

An example will clarify this. The *falha* (field-crops), in

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10. Kuo-Heng Shih, *China Enters the Machine Age,* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1944.

11. For an interesting discussion of the status system in the community with regard to work relations, see James B. McKee, "Status and Power in the Industrial Community: A Comment on Drucker's Thesis." *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 58, No. 4, 1953, pp. 364-370.

Kibbutz A was located some 45 miles away. Few members worked in it and most of them were marginal in the *Kibbutz*.[12] Most of its clients were outsiders. Direct contact by *Kibbutz* members with this branch was very small. However, owing to a large deficit in this particular branch, the production coordinator and the work coordinator began paying considerable attention to it. The production coordinator visited this branch more often than others. Problems concerning the *falha* were often discussed in the local newsletter and in the general assembly. The manager of the branch reported three times during the year to the general assembly on the development of this branch (in contrast to the accepted custom of one annual report.) Thus, although direct contact by the *Kibbutz* members with the work-group was minimized, the former received intensive communication concerning the situation in the *falha* through the formal hierarchy.

We compared this branch with the same branch in *Kibbutz* B. Here similar conditions of segregation existed with one important difference. In *Kibbutz* B there was a gap in the flow of formal communication as well as a minimization of direct contact. This gap resulted from tension existing between the manager of the branch and the production coordinator. The work-group in the branch sided with the former, while the elite of the *Kibbutz* supported the latter. Here a combination of gaps in both channels of communication emerged: The work-group was segregated from direct contact by its distance from the *Kibbutz* (its members would come home only for weekends) as well as from formal communication through the organizational hierarchy because of the conflict between the branch manager and the functionaries.

Relating Segregation to Solidarity

When we compared the degree of solidarity in the different branches of the two *Kibbutzim* discussed above we found:

1) The highest degree in the *falha* of *Kibbutz* B;

2) The second highest in the *falha* of *Kibbutz* A;

3) The lowest in the kitchen in both *Kibbutzim;*

4) The *tippul* was somewhere in between.[13]

When the degree of solidarity was related to the factors of segregation discussed earlier, it was found:

1) The kitchen, in which solidarity is the lowest, has the highest contact with and pressure from clients; the highest rate of turnover of all the branches in the *Kibbutz* (actually pressure to be relieved of work in the kitchen was so high that the work coordinator could not find permanent workers for it. It should also be mentioned that the prestige of the kitchen is the lowest of all the branches in the *Kibbutz*. The *Kibbutz* values emphasize productive agricultural labor. Kitchen service is considered "unproductive" and unspecialized work (as compared to the professional work of the *tippul*) and as a source of expense rather than income. Thus,

since kitchen workers have low prestige and no one hesitates to criticize them, the kitchen, in which segregation is the least, has the lowest amount of group-solidarity.

2) The *falha* on the other hand, is highly segregated; its clients are few and mainly not *Kibbutz* members; the turnover is the lowest in the *Kibbutz*. The prestige of the *falha* is the highest. In *Kibbutz* B as well as in many other *Kibbutzim*[14] but not in *Kibbutz* A members will do their utmost to join this group. It is agricultural work, considered productive, demanding physical strength and specialization. In *Kibbutz* B it is also the source of highest income, among the agricultural branches. Members are careful not to criticize this branch too much and functionaries tend not to interfere with its management. (Here, the difference between *Kibbutzim* A and B is considerable.) The distance of the *falha* from the *Kibbutz* is an additional factor in its segregation. Thus the most segregated branch, the *falha,* is also the branch with the highest degree of solidarity. In *Kibbutz* B the *falha* is relatively more segregated than in *Kibbutz* A, although in both *Kibbutzim* it is the most segregated branch. *Falha* A is less segregated than *falha* B because it represents a source of deficit rather than income and thus attracts attention, and there is a gap in the hierarchical communication between the branch and administration of the *Kibbutz*. The solidarity of *falha* workers in B is higher than in A. We do not know if all these factors played an equal part in bringing about this result. It seems that conflict between the branch and the *Kibbutz* functionaries, was of particular importance in creating the very high degree of solidarity. However, the general relationship between segregation and solidarity, holds true in this case.

3) The *tippul* stands in between. Contact with clients is less than in the kitchen, but much more than in the *falha*. The rate of turnover is considerably lower than in the kitchen. If *falha* is the work assignment most requested by men, *tippul* is the one most desired by women. Most *tippul* workers are permanent. The prestige of the *tippul* is "medium." It still is a service, not "real" work; it is a source of expense rather than income; but the work is professional; moreover, *tippul* workers handle the most sacred part of the *Kibbutz*—children —in contrast to the "materialistic," products of the kitchen. Work relations are pleasant, solidarity is high compared to the kitchen, but by no means as high as in the *falha*.

To summarize: The relationship between segregation and the emergence of solidaric work-groups seems to be fairly clear in the cases discussed. We shall now try to explain this relationship in somewhat more general terms.

Discussion

The *Kibbutz* as a community with an elaborate set of ideological commitments, has a large network of specified norms of behavior. These are inculcated in young children and new members; they are reinforced in special courses, ceremonies and other specific activities. However, the most fundamental mechanism for reinforcement is informal social control, which is an element present not only in special situa-

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12. Although the *falha* enjoyed high prestige, mainly marginal members worked there, owing to the extremely bad working conditions in this branch of *Kibbutz* A.

13. In order to avoid long descriptions, we have discussed only three branches in each of the two *Kibbutzim*. Actually, seven in each *Kibbutz* were observed and the relationship here described, holds true for all of them.

14. See Melford E. Spiro, *Kibbutz, Venture in Utopia,* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1956. Esp. p. 17.

tions and invested in special roles, but is part of all inter-action. As long as nothing is concealed from the community, public opinion is the main device of control. This means, that a high degree of informal communication is continuously go-ing on, keeping members abreast of developments in different parts of the *Kibbutz* and conveying the attitude of the public to the actors involved. If negligence occurs in a certain branch, 1) the community must know that this has happened, and 2) those responsible for the negligence must know the attitude of the community. If either the informative or the evaluative[15] flow of communication is impaired, departure from the norm is likely to go unpunished.

As the *Kibbutz* grows and becomes more complex, these informal channels of communication are no longer sufficient. They have to be supplemented by a formal line of commu-nication and control. Consequently, a formally organized hierarchy is established. Reports to the general assembly, the local newsletter and other formal media are employed to supply information to the community. Still, even here, the main source of control, is general public opinion.

However, some work-groups are more segregated than others. In some cases, there is little direct contact with the community (as in the case of a branch being some distance from the *Kibbutz* and having non-members as its clients) and formal control is rejected (as in case of conflict in *Kibbutz* B) or avoided (when members of the work-group enjoy high prestige). What is apt to happen in these cases, to such segregated groups?

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15. Informative communication—communication of facts; evalua-tive communication—communication of judgments.

Two possibilities emerge: 1) An uncontrolled situation will prevail with the behavior in the segregated group not influ-enced by public opinion or other mechanisms of control in the community; or, 2) an alternative mechanism of control independent of the community will develop. In the first in-stance, we could expect to find cases of deviant behavior. This, however, is only a theoretical possibility, since among the fourteen work-groups observed, no uncontrolled situation was found.

In the segregated work-group the following actually was found: Since the workers' solidaric ties with the community are weakened, being collectively oriented, they are very likely to develop more intensive emotional relations with each other, thus giving rise to a solidaric work-group. Once formed, this solidarity is apt to act as a mechanism of informal control, each member reinforcing the norms of his co-workers.

Theoretically, the group could embrace values and norms different from those held by the *Kibbutz* and thus, instead of reinforcing conformity, it would give rise to conflict between itself and the community. However, this has not been the case. The reasons why this is not so, are subjects for further research. We believe that the strong indoctrination of *Kibbutz* members and the continual reinforcement of *Kibbutz* values in non-work situations, may account for the tendency to conformity of the solidaric work-groups.

Thus segregation from the community leads to formation of solidaric work-groups; the latter tend to assume social control over their members, when the community no longer functions in this capacity.